DCCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 508 TE 001 510

AUTHOR VANDUZER, VERNICE
TITLE SUPERVISION OF HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH.
INSTITUTION COLORADC LANGUAGE ARTS SOCIETY, DENVER.
PUB DATE FEB 69
NOTE 9P.
JCURNAL CIT STATEMENT; V4 N2 P9-15,18-19 FEB 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.55
DESCRIPTORS ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL, *ADMINISTRATOR ROLE, *DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS (SCHOOL), *ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS, *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, HIGH SCHOOL SUPERVISORS, SUPERVISOR QUALIFICATIONS, *SUPERVISORY ACTIVITIES, TEACHER ADMINISTRATOR RELATIONSHIP, TEACHER GUIDANCE, TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS, TEACHING LCAD

ABSTRACT

A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN, WHO IS HIGHLY SKILLED IN LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND TEACHING METHODS, BECOMES INVALUABLE IN SUPERVISING AND SUPPLEMENTING THE WORK OF HIS TEACHERS WHEN HE IS GIVEN CONSIDERABLY LIGHTENED TEACHING LOADS AND THE AUTHORITY TO IMPLEMENT POLICIES. IN A TIME WHEN DEPARTMENT STAFFS ARE MADE UNSTABLE BY MOBILE TEACHERS AND WHEN INADEQUATELY TRAINED TEACHERS MUST MEET WITH FIVE CR MORE CLASSES PER DAY, THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN IS CALLED UPON TO PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN UPLIFTING AND INTEGRATING THE ENGLISH PROGRAM IN HIS SCHOOL. THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRMAN SHOULD INCLUDE BROADENING TEACHER COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOLARS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND THE COMMUNITY; SUPERVISING THE WRITING OF SPECIALIZED CURRICULUM GUIDES; DEMONSTRATING TEACHING METHODS FOR OLD AND NEW TEACHERS; AIDING IN THE SELECTION OF TEXTBOOKS AND CLASSROOM LIBRARIES; AND ENCOURAGING THE ESTABLISHMENT AND UTILIZATION OF AN ENGLISH CENTER CONTAINING A PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY, SPECIAL TEXTBOOKS, TEACHING MATERIALS, AND WORK SPACE FOR TEACHERS. (MF)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Statement; Vol. 4, No. 2, February 1969

Mrs. VanDuzer is Chairman of the English Department at North High School, Denver

ED036508

SUPERVISION OF HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH

or

Are Department Chairmen Really Necessary?

Vernice VanDuzer

There was a time when an American youngster could leave school at fourteen (or before) and go to work on the family farm with Dad and his brothers. Or he might go West, first with the wagons, later with the railroads. Later in our last century he could join the lines of men filing to mines and factories. Whatever he did, he could manage to carve some kind of life for himself and his family — even if he could not read nor write particularly well. And since work filled at least twelve to fourteen hours a day for six days a week, the handling of leisure time was no problem. And if, by some happy chance he did have leisure, there was plenty of space for him to use for his simple pleasures — maybe hunting and fishing or maybe just plain roistering about. Whatever his inclination, it didn't seem too important that he might not care for the pleasures of intellectual contemplation, esthetic creation, or the exchange of ideas common to real literacy. His English teacher — if he had one — didn't really play a significant role in his life.

EDO36508

Today's English teacher must play a most significant part in the life of each American youngster. The reasons are obvious: in a verbal, technological society a youngster with inadequate verbal skills is defeated in any effort to cope, to compete for his share of this society's abundance, an abundance both material and social. In an increasingly populated, urbanized society and in a country reducing its great outdoors systematically and steadily, the American youngster must be helped to use constructively that leisure time that he gets more of all the time. (Thanks to technology). A concluding paragraph in a publication of the National Council of Teachers of English reflects on the crucial importance of English instruction:

> "Any achievement beyond elementary oral drills in foreign language learning, beyond rudimentary computation in mathematics, beyond rote memorization and simple recall

> in the social and natural sciences requires the ability to read complex material with comprehension, to organize thoughts and express them clearly, and to contribute to and profit from listening to the exchange of mature ideas in open discussion. **The issue, moreover, is larger than preparation for advanced work in other subjects.** (My emphasis) The culturally deprived remain deprived until they acquire basic language skills. **Unless they master these skills, fundamental to all learning, they can never achieve full participation in the culture or make their full contribution to the economy.** (Emphasis mine) For all those students who will never go beyond grade 12, as surely as for those who will, the skills and the basic concepts of English are important."

The twenty years I've spent in the English classroom have been glorious years for me, but they have also held large measures of frustration. In all that time I've never been able to teach English as effectively as I knew I could. Putting aside personal fallibilities, which I freely admit, I know that the supporting administrative and supervisory structure has never been strong enough nor conceived imaginatively enough to help me be the effective teacher of English that I wanted to be. And during these twenty years, I've developed a firm conviction that tight English department organization, administration, and supervision is absolutely necessary. English department chairmen should be hired on the basis of their thorough preparation in language and literature and also in teaching methods. They must be given responsibility for building and maintaining an effective program of English and delegated the proper authority necessary to carry out that important responsibility.

Current Situation

It seems to me that a discussion of the current situation demands a brief description of the problems today's English teacher faces as well as a description of current department organization practices. This teacher has a better than 70 percent chance to be teaching in an inner city school with all the attendant problems posed by the social tensions and academic inadequacies of the disadvantaged. He's no doubt had little or no psychological or practical preparation for dealing with these formidable human problems. He has had too little training in teaching language skills, no clear direction in developing writing abilities in himself or in others, and probably no helpful work in the teaching of reading skills to secondary youngsters. He knows a lot about the symbolic ambiguity of the whale in **Moby Dick** and the sense of doom in Faulkner's works, but he doesn't know what to do with today's fifteen-year-old who cannot read and has about given up trying to do so.

And if he finds himself in a small Iowa town and perhaps is himself the entire English department — or if he finds himself

in suburbia — he will learn quickly that those boys and girls before him, "advantaged" or "disadvantaged," are not impressed "ipso facto" by the fact that he is an English teacher. Today's youngster is a much greater challenge to a teacher's competence, personal and moral resources, and creativeness than students of just ten years ago. "Urbanization," "mobility," "technology," "specialization" — today's cant echoes in my ears as I reflec' on the causes of this different kind of child. Because he probably lives in the city, he is both more sophisticated in the ways that people crowded together sophisticate each other and also provincial — or perhaps innocent is a better word — because he is so removed from the source of life and stability, the earth. Because he probably has not lived all his life in one place — has perhaps moved often — he is more worldly. Because both mother and father work and he does too, and because he very likely has a car, he is amazingly independent of parental and other adult control and supervision. Because he has spent much time during all the years of his life watching television, he becomes easily bored with traditional classroom material. He is one of an age group — all under 25 — which composes more than 50 percent of our population, so he knows (consciously or unconsciously) that he is a force to be reckoned with by advertisers, business, government, teachers, and parents. He is not too sure that our opinion really matters and is not eager to communicate with us. Then too he has constant reminders of the "rights" of people in a democracy, and not nearly so many reminders of their responsibilities. He is eager for experience, yet quickly bored. He needs direction and understanding from adults but he doesn't know it. He is creative but less disciplined; more knowledgable and yet often less prepared to handle his life than youngsters of earlier generations. He is a challenge to the English teacher and one that must be met — for his sake and for the national interest.

All of us involved in education bear a measure of the responsibility for effective English instruction — teacher training institutions, teachers themselves, the administrative hierarchy, and most importantly, at last, the public. So I am not suggesting that effective department organization and capable, dedicated chairmen alone can whip these immense problems. I am suggesting that such measures can, however, make a difference between failure and reasonable progress.

A summary in **The National Interest and the Continuing Education of Teachers of English,** published by the National Council of Teachers of English, makes graphically clear the basic conditions under which English is taught in the United States:

Key Findings

45 percent of the secondary English teachers teach five or more English classes daily

45.1 percent teach one or more classes in a subject other than English

25.7 percent of all secondary teachers of English regularly meet more than 150 students daily, with 2.5 percent of all teachers regularly meeting more than 200 students

Only 19.4 percent of secondary teachers of English meet 100 or fewer students daily

It is clear that in terms of their loads teachers need the consistent, sustaining help that good supervision can give. This need is made particularly obvious when one considers that nearly half are teaching in a subject other than English.

Consider further these statistics from a study of 7,417 English teachers conducted by the National Council of Teachers of English: Only 50.5 percent of these teachers of English in secondary schools have earned college majors in the subject. Furthermore, two-thirds of all teachers surveyed in this study do not consider themselves well prepared to teach composition and oral skills; 90 percent do not consider themselves well prepared to teach reading; almost 50 percent do not consider themselves well prepared to teach literature and language.

Another important factor to consider is that the mobility of our population is not a fact of life only for students; teachers move from school to school as well as from city to city. Few "Miss Doves" exist. This teacher turn-over poses a real threat to the establishment of a coherent, sequential program in English arrived at by consensus of the teachers on what should be taught, when it should be introduced, and how the English learnings are best taught. When departments are stable over a period of years a consensus grows; communication is effective because time and familiarity provide the proper climate for it. Lacking this built-in stability, departments needed tighter organization.

Then too teachers struggle today with a problem that, at first glance, doesn't seem serious. This is the problem of the "traveling teacher." Crowded buildings and out-moded facilities for increasing numbers of students have robbed thousands of teachers of rooms to call their own. This makes it extremely difficult to have materials easily available and audio-visual equipment ready to use. These "traveling teachers" need department help.

Let's stack these statistical findings and English teaching problems against the time given to department chairman to help teachers. In terms of numbers of English classes met daily, 1,064 department chairmen responded as follows:

One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	More than six
2.3	7.3	15.4	31.1	38.4	5.4	0.1

In terms of non-English classes met daily I was shocked to find these figures:

None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
65.6	18.0	8.5	4.6	2.2	0.6	0.4

"Departmental chairmen," according to the study, "appear to be assigned a **slightly** (my emphasis) smaller number of classes than are regular teachers of English. Their additional non-teaching time, perhaps the equivalent of one class period, is used in some schools for such administrative and supervisory responsibilities as visiting classes, conferring with new teachers, distributing books, and preparing curricular materials."

It should be abundantly clear that precious little help can be given to teachers by a department head who has one period a day to do all the things mentioned. Gladys Veidemanis, writing of the English department chairman's role in the September 1967 **English Journal,** asks this: "Are we really serious about the kind of teaching in literature, language, and composition we expect in our secondary schools? Truly, the public school teacher puts in a factory laborer's workday and fulfills the professional man's workday on his own time." If the regular English teacher spends this time, consider the hours of work accruing to a conscientious department chairman. The task cannot be accomplished without the necessary time to do it. And with the time must be given responsibility, authority, and compensation. It will be an important and demanding job.

A Possible Solution

There is seldom just one way — or even one **good** way — to do a job. Fully aware of this, I do not claim that the administration and supervision of English departments can be organized **only** along the lines that I now suggest in order to insure improved English instruction. I am unabashedly certain though that the organization that I suggest would perform miracles for a great number of English teachers and their students.

The fundamental task and the service with the most persuasive and important effect would be that of opening and articulating the lines of communication between levels of teaching. I have long felt — and professional journals bear me out — that a continuing and central problem is the "professional isolation" that Gladys Veidemanis speaks of in her article, "Frankly Speaking — A Candid View of the Department Chairman's Role":

> "As fellow professionals, we should direct our major efforts less to allocating responsibilities for teaching uses of the semicolon or distinctions between lyric and epic poetry, more to eliminating superficiality, pettiness, repetitiveness, and busy work in the teaching of English. We should be concerned less about petrified sequences, more

> about defining the legitimate intellectual concerns of our field. The curriculum will be as unified and as scholarly as the intellectual community of teachers it involves . . . "professional isolation," I submit, continues to be a central problem among English teachers, both in the small school with no specifically designated chairman and in the large system, in which the individual teacher often has no voice in establishing either curriculum, policy, or academic standards."

So, basic to the functions of the department chairman that I shall outline is an awareness that providing for steady communication between English scholars and English teachers, among teachers on a staff, between teachers and administrator, and between teachers and the community is the ultimate means of improving English instruction. I cannot see that the fundamental nature of the department chairman's role would be altered by even quite radical departures from traditional school operation. Ungraded schools, flexible or modular scheduling, vastly increased use of machines, extended school years, dramatically increased emphasis on mass media and oral communication — none of these approaches negate the need for verbal skills nor for steady communication among those charged to teach them.

The following English department organization has as its key element a strong department chairman. This department chairman should have the security afforded by the following provisions for department organization. Two national conferences on "The Organization, Administration, and Supervision of High School Departments of English" held in Urbana, Illinois, in October and in Cleveland, Ohio, in November, 1964, made the following recommendations. I endorse them enthusiastically.

1. Every department should have an English Center to house its professional library, its special textbook and teaching material collection, its file of the end-of-the-year examinations, its audio-visual equipment, and its work space for teachers. (I could write an entire paper on the English Center alone.)
2. Room libraries of approximately 500 selected books, (an average criterion) many of them paperback, should be provided for every English classroom.
3. In large departments (fifteen or more teachers), grade level representatives should be appointed for the year to serve with the chairman as a steering committee concerned with books, materials, and curricular matters; and such teachers should be given common preparation periods and released time for meetings.
4. Every English department should be given part-time professional clerical help and in a large department (fifteen or

more teachers), full-time clerical help should be available. A competent secretary or clerk can do much of the non-professional work now done by English teachers, thereby freeing these teachers to spend more time on study, theme correction, and class preparation.

Given the support of this basic department organization, the department chairman must then be provided the time and resources necessary to help English teachers perform well their crucial role in the lives of American youngsters.

Probably no chairman of a department of any size should teach more than one class. Two would be an absolute maximum, for the time involved in personal study, class preparation, and paper correction for more than two classes would rob the chairman of the time and energy necessary to provide the supportive structure — both psychological and practical — that teachers need. We must remember, too, that students are not merely receptacles for holding the fruits of **our** study, **our** preparation, and **our** advice on their papers; they are human beings of great diversity in temperament, ability, needs; teacher time and teacher energy are taxed by this diversity. A department head cannot be involved with a great number of student personalities and have the personal resources necessary to direct a program in English. Yet, it is necessary that the chairman continue classroom teaching to "keep in touch" with the dimensions of the task. Importantly, this chairman should vary, each term or each year, the kind of class he teaches; if he teaches only the advanced placement English, for instance, he cannot maintain his hold on the realities of teaching English to the much greater number of youngsters lacking the motivation and skills of this more select group.

Given the time, responsibility, authority, and the compensation necessary, the department chairman will then be in a position to fulfill the following functions as outlined by the Urbana and Cleveland conferences:

1. To work out basic agreements about the content and sequence with members of his department and with department chairman of other schools in his district.
2. To supervise the writing of guides appropriate to the students of his particular school. Though all teachers should be involved in discussion of the "philosophical issues underlying curricular decisions," the responsibility for writing guides and preparing materials should be assigned to a few teachers.
3. To work out with other administrative and supervisory personnel a program of supervision of teachers to help with problems of discipline and techniques of teaching. Visitation and conferences by qualified subject area specialists should be scheduled by the department chairman also.

4. To do demonstration teaching for new teachers or for experienced teachers launching something new or sufficiently critical of themselves to be interested in more effective ways to approach certain English teaching problems. Incidentally, demonstrations by people comfortable and happy with students often communicates more to the teacher observing than the actual technique demonstrated.

5. To help teachers with the continued evaluation of student performance in language, composition, and literature — especially with the preparation of formal tests and evaluation of writing.

6. To work with teachers and the school district in selecting textbooks, classroom libraries, and audio-visual material and equipment.

7. To keep department network in efficient operating order. Miss Veidemanis underlines this function as she says: "An effective chairman just has to be a good housekeeper, able to comprehend the operation of the department as a whole, establish a workable and uncluttered routine, and efficiently organize and administer the department's materials and resources." This function becomes increasingly important in the schools with numbers of traveling teachers and outmoded facilities.

8. To encourage the professionalism of members of the English department. The chairman should assess the needs of teachers for inservice courses, institutes and workshops; advise and counsel teachers concerning course selection; and **work with college or district authorities to make such offerings available.** He should encourage participation of teachers in conferences designed to bring together high school and college teachers of English, articulation conferences sponsored by universities, meetings and institutes planned by NCTE and its affiliates, and the advanced placement conference of the College Entrance Examination Board. And, at last, the department chairman should stimulate teachers to read the professional literature — to stay abreast of recent research, new techniques, and new materials designed to take care of the verbal needs of students in this fast-changing world.

It follows, I think, that the department chairman charged with such serious responsibilities should have a voice in teacher selection and hiring. This is, however, a controversial point, and not nearly so important as being given time and resources necessary to help the teachers once they are hired. Department chairmen of English should also perform a role in communicating to the public the role of language in students' lives and the nature of the English program. They should, of course, have a well articulated policy on book selection, the handling of controversial material, and a well-defined role in handling censorship problems.

At last, it is the department chairman's task to provide the kind of warm, personal support for each English teacher that would reduce the sense of isolation and inadequacy he can so easily feel in today's modern urban school. The teacher must not feel alone and lost; if she does, so will her students. The English teacher has the key role in helping students develop the skills they need to live an abundant life and in helping to build in students the sense of community so necessary to our human survival.